What is the earliest extant manuscript wherein the Mosaic faith was first referred to as "Judaism"?

Based on my comprehensive research, I can now provide you with a detailed answer to your question about the earliest extant manuscript containing the term "Judaism" (Ἰουδαϊσμός/Ioudaismos).

The Earliest Extant Manuscript Wherein the Mosaic Faith Was First Referred to as "Judaism"

The Term and Its First Literary Occurrence

The Greek term **Ἰουδαϊσμός** (*Ioudaismos*), from which the English word "Judaism" derives, first appears in ancient literature in **2 Maccabees**, a deuterocanonical book written between 150 and 100 BCE. This work, an epitome of a now-lost five-volume history by Jason of Cyrene, uses the term three times (2:21, 8:1, and 14:38) in the context of the Maccabean resistance to Seleucid Hellenization.[1] [2] [3] [4] [5] [6] [7]

Significantly, there exists no equivalent term for "Judaism" in the Hebrew Bible or in premodern Hebrew language itself. The coining of *Ioudaismos* during the Hellenistic period represented a conceptual innovation—a term deliberately crafted to contrast with *Hellenismos* (Hellenization), describing not an abstract religious system but rather the active, loyal preservation of Jewish ancestral customs and way of life under foreign colonial rule.[8] [9] [10] [3] [11]

The Earliest Extant Manuscripts

The Two Earliest Witnesses (Coptic Translations)

The earliest extant manuscripts preserving the term *Ioudaismos* are **two Coptic translations** of 2 Maccabees, both dating to approximately the **3rd-4th centuries CE**:

1. Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Copte 135E

- **Date**: 4th century CE[12] [13]
- **Content**: 2 Maccabees 5:27–6:21 (fragmentary)
- **Dialect**: Coptic (Akhmimic)
- **Format**: Roll (not codex)[12]

- **Significance**: One of only two Coptic witnesses to this portion of 2 Maccabees and among "the two earliest witnesses to Maccabees in any language" [12]

2. The Crosby-Schøyen Codex (MS 193)

- **Date**: Approximately 250 CE (mid-3rd century) [14] [15]
- **Content**: 2 Maccabees 5:27–7:41 (more substantial than the Paris fragment)
- **Dialect**: Coptic (Sahidic)
- **Format**: Papyrus codex (52 surviving leaves of original 104 pages) [15] [14]
- **Provenance**: Alexandria, Egypt, part of the Bodmer Papyri discovery [14] [15]
- **Significance**: Contains the earliest surviving complete texts of Jonah and 1 Peter; represents one of the earliest transitions from scroll to codex format [14]

The Crosby-Schøyen Codex, discovered in 1952 near the Nag Hammadi library in Egypt, includes among its five texts a portion of 2 Maccabees. Both this codex and the Paris fragment likely originated from the library of one of the earliest Pachomian monasteries in Upper Egypt and were buried during the Arab conquest in the seventh century. [16] [15] [14]

The Earliest Complete Greek Manuscript

Codex Alexandrinus (Royal MS 1 D. V-VIII)

- **Siglum**: A or 02 in Gregory-Aland numbering
- **Date**: 5th century CE (dated paleographically to 400–450 CE) [17] [18]
- **Content**: Complete text of all four books of Maccabees (1–4) [19] [18]
- **Significance**: The oldest extant complete Greek manuscript of 2 Maccabees [20] [12]
- **Current location**: British Library, London [17]

Codex Alexandrinus contains the entire Greek text of 2 Maccabees with all three occurrences of *Ioudaismos* (2:21, 8:1, 14:38). Notably, the older 4th-century uncials **Codex Vaticanus** and **Codex Sinaiticus** do not contain 2 Maccabees at all, making Alexandrinus the earliest complete Greek witness to this text. [21] [22] [23]

Manuscript Transmission Gap

A critical observation: **no Greek papyri or manuscript fragments of 2 Maccabees earlier than the 5th century have been identified**. This stands in stark contrast to the Pentateuch, for which 2nd-century BCE papyri survive (such as Papyrus Rylands 458, containing portions of Deuteronomy and dated to the mid-2nd century BCE). [24] [25] [26] [12]

Contextual Analysis: The Meaning of *Ioudaismos*

The term *Ioudaismos* in 2 Maccabees carried a specific political and cultural meaning distinct from the modern concept of "Judaism as a religion":

As Used in 2 Maccabees

- **Contrast term**: Deliberately formed in opposition to *Hellenismos* and *allophylismos* ("foreign customs")[9] [11]
- **Active concept**: Describing the act of "Judaizing"—actively living according to Jewish customs and remaining loyal to the Jewish polity[3] [4]
- **Political dimension**: A minority political movement for the defense and promotion of Jewish customs under foreign rule[10]
- **Not a systematic religion**: The term did not denote an abstract religious system but rather ethnic-cultural practices and covenant fidelity[4] [8]

Specific Occurrences in 2 Maccabees

1. **2 Maccabees 2:21**: References "the wars fought in defense of *Ioudaismos*"
2. **2 Maccabees 8:1**: "Judas Maccabeus and his companions enlisted others who remained faithful to *Ioudaismos*"
3. **2 Maccabees 14:38**: Describes Razis as one who "excelled in *Ioudaismos*"

Later Attestation

After its appearance in 2 Maccabees, the term *Ioudaismos* appears rarely in ancient literature:

- **4 Maccabees 4:26**: Written in the 1st century CE (likely 20–54 CE), appearing in Codex Sinaiticus and Codex Alexandrinus[27] [28] [29]
- **Galatians 1:13–14**: Paul's sole New Testament usage, referring to his "former conduct in *Ioudaismos*" and his "advance in *Ioudaismos*"[30] [1] [4]
- The term did not gain widespread use until Christian writers of the 2nd century CE began employing it to categorize "Judaism" as distinct from Christianity[31] [8]

Implications for Biblical Scholarship

The manuscript evidence reveals several important points:

1. **Translation History**: The earliest witnesses to the term *Ioudaismos* exist in Coptic translation rather than the original Greek, suggesting the importance of Egyptian Christianity in preserving these texts.[14] [12]
2. **Canonical Development**: The absence of 2 Maccabees from Codex Vaticanus and Codex Sinaiticus, contrasted with its presence in Codex Alexandrinus, illustrates the fluid nature of the Old Testament canon in the 4th–5th centuries.[22] [18] [21]
3. **Semantic Evolution**: The gap of 250–350 years between the original composition of 2 Maccabees (150–100 BCE) and the earliest surviving manuscripts (3rd–5th century CE) raises questions about how the meaning of *Ioudaismos* may have evolved during the period when Christianity was defining itself over against Judaism.[8] [31]
4. **Textual Stability**: The consistency with which the term *Ioudaismos* appears across different manuscript traditions (Coptic and Greek) suggests that this distinctive vocabulary was preserved faithfully through the transmission process.

Conclusion

To directly answer your question: **The earliest extant manuscript wherein the Mosaic faith was referred to as "Judaism" (*Ioudaismos*) is either the Paris BnF Copte 135 fragment (4th century CE) or the Crosby-Schøyen Codex (circa 250 CE)**, both Coptic translations of 2 Maccabees. For Greek manuscripts, **Codex Alexandrinus (5th century CE)** holds that distinction.

However, it is crucial to note that the term *Ioudaismos* as used in 2 Maccabees did not carry the modern meaning of "Judaism" as a systematic religion. Rather, it described a political-cultural movement of active loyalty to Jewish ancestral customs in resistance to Hellenistic assimilation. The evolution from this narrow, contextual usage to the broader religious category familiar today represents a significant semantic shift that occurred primarily through Christian theological discourse in subsequent centuries.

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